

IN BRIEF

Ibra, Pep get one match ban

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola and Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic have received one match bans for their red cards in the 2-2 draw against Almeria at the weekend, the Spanish club said Tuesday.

The referee sent Guardiola to the stands for arguing with a linesman, while Ibrahimovic got a straight red for a foul on Almeria left-back Cisma.

It means the Barcelona manager will not be able to take his place on the bench for Sunday's important league match against Valencia and Ibrahimovic will also miss out.

Breno out for season

AFP, Nuremberg

Bayern Munich's Brazilian defender Breno, currently on loan at Nuremberg, has been ruled out for the season after being on the end of a horror tackle at the weekend, the Bundesliga leaders confirmed on Tuesday. The 20-year-old limped off in the 33rd minute of Nuremberg's 3-2 defeat of title challengers Bayer Leverkusen on Sunday after Stefan Reinartz's wild challenge.

Breno ruptured ligaments in his right knee and will travel to the United States for an operation with renowned US surgeon Dr Richard Steadman, his club Bayern Munich said.

Steadman's previous patients include Dutch striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy and Manchester United's Owen Hargreaves.

The Brazilian centre-back, who signed with Bayern for 12 million euros at the start of 2008, joined their Bavarian rivals on loan in January on a six-month deal.

Reinartz has written to Breno to offer his apologies.

Henry suffers training injury

AFP, Madrid

France captain Thierry Henry missed training for his Spanish club Barcelona on Tuesday after feeling a pull in his left Achilles tendon, the Catalan giants said.

Barcelona's medical staff treated the 32-year-old French striker while the rest of his team-mates trained as normal.

The former Arsenal man had been in line to return to Barca's starting line-up against Valencia on Sunday, having just started one of the past six La Liga matches.

FIFA stops China factory making WC mascots

AFP, Shanghai

A Chinese factory ordered to stop producing mascots for the World Cup due to allegations of sweatshop conditions defended itself Wednesday, saying its facilities were among the best in China.

Global Brands Group, the master licensee for all FIFA World Cup 2010 merchandise, said Tuesday it had withdrawn manufacturing approval for the Shanghai Fashion Plastic Products after an audit showed standards had been flouted.

The Global Brands Group investigated the factory, which produced figures of the tournament's dreadlocked leopard mascot Zakumi, following reports that it employed teenage workers, ran 13-hour shifts and paid just three dollars a day.

"Considering China's actual conditions ... the environment in our factory, if not the best, is very good indeed," a company official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The toy and gift manufacturer also produced merchandise for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and is a supplier for this year's World Expo in Shanghai, according to its website.



FINAL NAIL IN THE COFFIN: Arsenal striker Nicklas Bendtner (L) completes his hat-trick from a spotkick to make it 5-0 during their champion's league encounter against Porto at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal bury Porto

AFP, London



Arsenal swept into the Champions League quarterfinals as Nicklas Bendtner silenced his critics with a hat-trick in a majestic 5-0 win against Porto on Tuesday.

Arsene Wenger's side had trailed 2-1 from the first leg of this second round tie, but Bendtner overturned that deficit within 25 minutes of the return at the Emirates Stadium to set up a 6-2 aggregate victory.

French midfielder Samir Nasri put Arsenal in total control with a sublime solo effort in the second half and Emmanuel Eboué added a fourth before Bendtner completed his treble from the penalty spot.

It was a sweet moment of vindication for Bendtner after

the Denmark striker came in for some stinging criticism for his poor finishing in Saturday's victory over Burnley.

While Bendtner's lack of goals had led some fans to call for him to be dropped, Wenger kept faith in the 22-year-old and got his reward as the Dane helped Arsenal keep alive their bid for a Premier League and Champions League double.

Although Porto arrived with a slender advantage, the Portuguese champions had lost their last six matches in London and, even without injured captain Cesc Fabregas, it was Arsenal who dominated from the start.

When Bacary Sagna looped a cross into the Porto penalty area, Andrey Arshavin was left unmarked at the far post and the tiny Russian's header drew a good save from Helton.

It was a warning that Porto failed to heed as another header from Arshavin started the move that led to Arsenal's 10th minute opener.

Arshavin was by far the smallest player on the pitch but he was still able to win a header that found Nasri and he slipped a sublime return pass back towards the Russian.

As Arshavin bore down on goal, Nuno Coelho made a despairing tackle which only succeeded in knocking the ball to Bendtner, who slid across to push his shot into the empty net.

A pair of farcical mistakes from Arsenal goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski had proved decisive in the first leg at the Dragao Stadium, but it was Porto who shot themselves in the foot in the 25th minute.

Fucile had the chance to

clear deep in his own half but tried to play his way out of trouble and instead gifted possession to Arshavin with a careless pass.

Arshavin escaped his markers with a clever flick and whipped over a low cross that Bendtner gleefully prodded past Helton for his seventh goal of the season.

Bendtner has never lacked confidence so his belief must have been sky-high by now and he almost completed his hat-trick with a curling strike which Helton pushed away for a corner.

By the time Abou Diaby's header was saved by Helton, Arsenal were playing with such verve and imagination that the tie looked all but over already.

Nasri's elegant play in midfield was more than compensating for the absence of Fabregas and the Frenchman forced a sprawling stop from Helton as Arsenal went for the kill.

Arsenal hadn't overturned

a first leg deficit when they played the return at home for over 30 years and they had a scare early in the second half when Nasri had to clear off the line from Cristian Rodriguez's header.

But that only served to spark the Gunners back into life and Nasri extinguished Porto's hopes with a breath-taking goal in the 63rd minute.

Taking possession wide on the right edge of the Porto penalty area, he jinked past three Porto defenders with a mesmerising dribble and unleashed a fierce strike that gave Helton no chance.

Arsenal weren't finished there and, in the 66th minute, Arshavin sent substitute Eboué galloping clear and the defender rounded Helton before slotting home.

There was still time for one more goal as Fucile gave away a penalty with a foul on Eboué in stoppage time and Bendtner stroked in his hat-trick from the spot.

Juve, Liverpool seek salvation

AFP, Paris



European heavyweights Juventus and Liverpool will both seek to rescue disappointing seasons when the first legs of their respective Europa League last-16 ties kick off on Thursday.

Both clubs have fallen well off the pace in their domestic championships and face a battle to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Juve have begun to move in the right direction under new coach Alberto Zaccheroni, however, and are now just two points outside the Serie A top four after a 2-1 victory at Fiorentina on Saturday.

Their Europa League opponents are Premier League club Fulham, who produced one of the upsets of the competition in the previous round by eliminating defending champions Shakhtar Donetsk of Ukraine.

"I don't think many teams will play football as well as Shakhtar Donetsk did," said Fulham's Welsh midfielder Simon Davies.

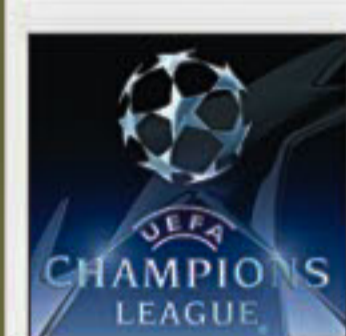
"We've got to believe in ourselves because we've had some really good results lately. We'll play our game and remain solid. We know it's going to be a very tough game but we also know we're capable of getting a result."

Juve's Italy international centre-back Giorgio Chiellini will miss the match with a left thigh injury but should be fit for the return leg in London next week.

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Bayern scrape through

AFP, Florence



Bayern Munich booked their place in the quarterfinals of the Champions League on Tuesday despite losing 3-2 to a valiant Fiorentina in a topsy-turvy encounter.

The German side, who had won 2-1 in Munich, went through on the away goals' rule after the aggregate scores finished 4-4.

In the end, Miroslav Klose's controversial goal in the first leg proved decisive.

The home side went two goals up inside 54 minutes through Juan Vargas and Stevan Jovetic before Bayern captain Mark van Bommel's strike on the hour mark began a flurry of superb goals.

Jovetic grabbed his second with a solo effort but man-of-the-match Arjen Robben broke Viola hearts with a stunning 30-yard strike.

After the late and controversial drama in Munich in the first leg, the match began tentatively with a string of misplaced passes as the sides struggled against a strong gale.

Vargas tested Hans-Jorg Butt after five minutes with an audacious 40-yard free kick but it was the German side who settled better with Franck Ribery and particularly Arjen Robben causing danger down the wings.

well as the wind in the first half, had created little until the 28 minute when Marco Marchionni picked the ball up 30 yards out and instantly let fly.

A surprised Butt fumbled to Vargas who somehow outmuscled Daniel Van Buyten and, from a tight angle, found the top corner with his favoured left foot.

Bayern should have equalised six minutes later when Bastian Schweinsteiger's deep header found its way through the heart of the Viola defence

Fiorentina (ITA) 3 (Vargas 28, Jovetic 54, 64) Bayern Munich (GER) 2 (van Bommel 60, Robben 65) 4-4 on aggregate. Bayern Munich win on away goals

to Robben 15 yards out.

The Dutchman's left foot shot was true but a flying Sebastian Frey threw himself backwards and brilliantly tipped the Dutchman's shot onto the bar and over.

With Bayern needing a

goal, the pace noticeably quickened after the break.

Alberto Gilardino had a glorious chance to double the lead five minutes back on the pitch but shot weakly eight yards out allowing Butt to save.

Marchionni had been getting plenty of the ball down the right and from another cross on 54 minutes Gilardino backheeled delightfully into the path of the onrushing Jovetic, who drilled home from 10 yards for 2-0. It set off a flurry of goals.

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Duo vie for Ivory Coast job

AFP, Tokyo

French coach Philippe Troussier is vying with Dutchman Guus Hiddink for the job to guide the Ivory Coast through this year's World Cup, a Japanese newspaper reported Wednesday.

"I got an offer (from the Ivory Coast). But there is another candidate that is Mr. Hiddink," Troussier, who led Japan to the World Cup last-16 round in 2002, the Nikkan Sports daily quoted him as saying.

"To me, the World Cup is an interesting challenge," said the 54-year-old Frenchman, now general manager of FC Ryukyu, a club in Japan's third-tier division. "I definitely want to do it."

Whoever gets the job will take over from Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic, who was axed after the Ivory Coast failed to make the top four in the African Nations Cup last month.

The job will last until the completion of the Ivory Coast's campaign in the World Cup in South Africa, which is due to kick off in mid-June. The Ivory Coast are bunched in a tough group, with Brazil, Portugal and North Korea.

"It is an emergency situation for the Ivory Coast. I am not interested in the details of the contract," said Troussier, according to the daily.

Kaiser opposes change

Football

AFP, Berlin

German legend Franz Beckenbauer pleaded on Wednesday for the rules of football to be left as they are, warts and all, because refereeing errors can be part of the sport's charm.

"Leave football as simple and as clear as it is, together with all its mistakes," Beckenbauer, a member of the executive committee of FIFA, the sport's governing body, told the German daily Bild.

"The 1966 Wembley goal is part of football legend. We've been talking about it for over 40 years in England and Germany, and probably still will be in another 40 years. Just like Maradona's 'Hand of God' goal (in 1986)."

The comments followed some radical proposals on Tuesday by Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal, including doing away with throw-ins, having two referees on the pitch and cameras replacing linesmen for off-side decisions.

But Beckenbauer, 64, a World Cup winner for West Germany both as player and coach, said that even with different camera angles, off-side decisions can be so tight that "at the end of the day only a human being has to decide."

He conceded, however, that another official behind the goal line might help.

"It is being tested right now in the Europa League, apparently with success."

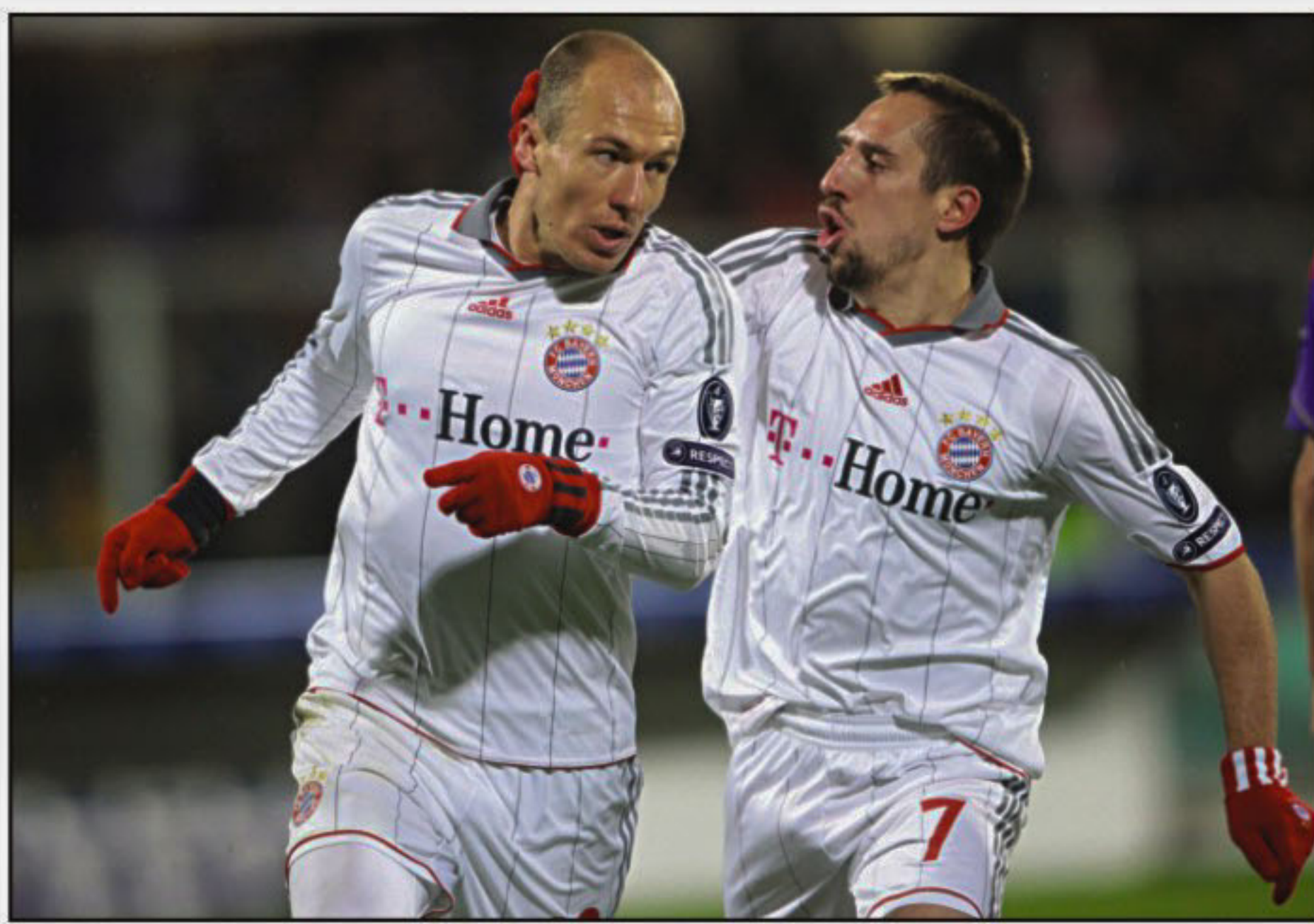
"Players are holding and shoving less in the box because they know very well that someone right next to the goal is watching them very closely."

"This goal referee would probably have seen Thierry Henry's handball (France's) World Cup qualifier against Ireland."

And he said that it would also have meant that Bayern Munich, of which he is honorary president, would have had its crucial 89-minute goal in last month's Champions League last-16 home leg against Fiorentina disallowed.

Replays showed scorer Miroslav Klose was yards offside. Having won the first leg 2-1 in Munich thanks to the controversial decision, Bayern went through on the away goals rule in Fiorentina after Arjen Robben and captain Mark van Bommel scored in Tuesday's 3-2 defeat.

The result meant that the Bavarian giants, currently riding high at the top of the Bundesliga, went through on away goals after the score finished 4-4 on aggregate.



Bayern Munich winger Arjen Robben (L) celebrates his stunning goal with teammate Franck Ribery during their champion's league clash against Fiorentina at the Artemio Franchi Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP